

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH MAJOR GENERAL SEAN BYRNE, COMMANDER, U.S. ARMY HUMAN RESOURCES COMMAND SUBJECT: CAPABILITIES OF THE AVIATION BRIGADE MODERATOR: CHARLES J. "JACK" HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE PUBLIC AFFAIRS TIME: 9:00 A.M. EST DATE: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2007

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GEN. BYRNE: And good morning to everybody out there. I'm Major General Sean Byrne. I'm the commander of the Army's Human Resources Command here in Alexandria, Virginia.

Before we begin, I just want to make a couple of opening comments. But I want to tell you first off that how much I really appreciate the opportunity to speak with each and every one of you this morning. I, quite honestly, have not done a lot of blogging, but I know of its value and the increasing importance of blogs. And I know that many of our soldiers visit your blogs, as well as many others that are interested in the topics that we're going to talk about visit your blogs.

Before I answer the questions, I'd like to start out with a short statement of where we are today with regard to the deployment of our active duty soldiers. Hopefully, this will dispel any myths concerning deployments among our soldiers.

As of today, roughly 93 percent of our active duty soldiers have either deployed, are in the process of deploying, or they're in long-term training or units that have not yet been scheduled to deploy. Of that group currently on active duty, more than 60 percent have actually deployed in the past five years in support of the global war on terror.

These numbers include only those that are currently on active duty and do not account for the roughly 400,000 who have been on active duty but have left the service over the last five years, at the end of their enlistments. And a large number of that 400,000 had actually deployed. I would guesstimate that number as considerably more than 175,000, probably closer to 200,000, that are not included in that 60 percent that I gave you earlier.

Of those on active duty, there's roughly another 30 percent of soldiers who are either pending deployment, in a deployable unit, or in their initial military training. Overall, almost 93 percent of our soldiers are in those categories, which means they're basically exactly where we need them to be right now.

I think the active duty force is being managed very well. We have roughly 7 percent of the force -- that's roughly 37,000 soldiers -- who have not deployed and who are not in units currently scheduled for deployment. And those are the soldiers that we're most interested in reaching out to.

Many of them are in institutional Army positions. That could be inside the training base, in Recruiting Command, units such as those. We're working to identify those soldiers who have not deployed and deploy them when it makes sense. This is good, because as we move these soldiers into deploying units, those that have deployed can subsequently move out. They can take a break, take a knee.

Now, when I say we need it at least to make sense, we simply don't deploy soldiers for the sake of deploying them. They have to have the right skills and experience for the job they're being scheduled for. We don't place people in jobs they're not trained for; it does the soldier no good and it clearly does the Army no good. Also, we don't want to disrupt the cohesion and leadership of a unit just to send a soldier down-range.

Deploying a soldier is much more complex than simply deciding he or she needs to deploy. So we're reaching out to those that have not deployed, but we're trying to do it as smartly as possible.

And rank, in some case, does matter. There are certainly more requirements for lower ranking soldiers, whether officer or enlisted. As soldiers progress through the ranks, there are fewer opportunities for them to deploy, in some cases. And a specialty makes a difference. For instance, there's a need for certain specialties here in the States, in some cases, more than overseas.

And those soldiers are certainly supporting the global war on terror efforts; they're just doing it where their skills and experiences are needed the most. Quite often the impact on the battlefield is not always commensurate to the proximity to the battlefield.

So what is Human Resources Command doing to ensure that all soldiers who have not deployed in support of the global war have the opportunity to deploy? Right now, our organization is tracking and closely monitoring all soldiers who've not deployed. Their assignment managers are working those, those issues, hard, but we're trying to do it very smartly as part of a very deliberate process.

Some people do actually believe that we have soldiers that are trying to evade deployments. I don't believe this is true. Soldiers are special folks who've joined the military and are strong, strong supporters of their country and supporters of their unit. I hear far more many -- many stories about those soldiers who want to go back a second time or a third time, be part of the team, and I hear very little about those who don't want to deploy.

And many people ask me what are our most frequently deployed military occupational specialties. They're the infantry, the aviation, engineer, transportation, and field artillery. In the end, if all comes down to making sure that the best-qualified soldiers are paired with the best duties that fit their skills and experiences.

The trends I see is that we have an increase in the numbers who have not deployed versus those who are now deploying. I'm sorry -- we have an increase in the numbers who are deploying, versus those that have not deployed. So while a lot of people can deploy more than once, you can be assured that those who have not yet deployed will be closely monitored, and we will do everything we can at the appropriate time to get them into the fight.

So if you take nothing away from -- more away from this discussion today, understand that I'm very pleased and excited about our soldiers and all they do. Their sacrifices are very, very great, both the soldiers and the families. We're doing all we can at our level to ensure there is equity in the system. Each deployment by a soldier represents a huge sacrifice on numerous fronts, and we appreciate it. We could not do what we are doing now without the great soldiers and the supports of their families at home.

Gentlemen, with that I'd like to turn it over to your questions.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much Major General Sean Byrne, with us this morning for the Bloggers Roundtable.

So Brian, you were first on line, so why don't you get us started?

Q Thank you very much. This is Brian (Jordan ?) from Military.com.

What you just said all sounds very, very positive, so I want to ask you is the increased dwell time that some in the Senate and the House have been looking for but not demanding, from the Army an issue or not? Is it a concern or not?

GEN. BYRNE: But clearly, dwell time is an issue. We're right now, for many of the units over the last couple of years, the dwell time has been basically one year deployed, one year back. We are doing everything we can to lengthen that dwell time. Part of that is always going to be contingent on what the requirements are in the theater, but also what we're doing.

I indicated earlier, part of our goal is to move people out of the deploying formations and move those that have not deployed in to back-fill them so that we can give those soldiers that have deployed possibly once, possibly twice, a chance to take a break.

But right now, the deployment cycles are basically met -- based on the requirements in the theater, and that's really an operational question.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And John.

Q Pardon?

MR. HOLT: John Donovan?

Q Okay.

MR. HOLT: John, are you with us?

Q Yes, I am. I just punched my mute button -- (laughter) -- and neglected to un-mute myself.

I'm a retired soldier, General, and long enough ago to remember PERSCOM, and I won't hold your job against you.

GEN. BYRNE: I can remember when it was MILPERSMAN, so --

Q Well, yeah, I can remember that, too.

GEN. BYRNE: I think I recall that as well.

Q Okay. All right. I started in '75. (Laughter.)

GEN. BYRNE: '69 for me.

Q '72 for me.

Q Okay, so. We all know it's actually better than it was, even if we've -- go into odd names.

One of the things -- and I know this is mostly anecdotal, but I know three or four people who can wear a different deployable -- deployed unit patch every day of the week. And as we -- do we have processes in place -- and if you talked about it early on, I should say I'm a retired artilleryman, and I didn't catch all your stats in your opening statement -- on catching the guys who are getting caught up in serial deployments.

I know two field-grade officers who've got five combat patches. Two of them are hyper-volunteers, but I'm just wondering if there's been enough rumbling about any of that anywhere that there's any process that we keep an eye on those types of guys?

GEN. BYRNE: Well, clearly there is a process, and trust me, we track this very carefully. Now, I would daresay though if you're talking about people that have as many combat patches as you're talking about, more than likely what they've done is they've been in special operations-type units or units that have had very relatively short-in-duration deployments.

I know that when you get into the special ops field, quite often their deployments are three and four months, then they come back. They have a dwell period, then they go back for shorter deployments.

Very few people have more than three deployments that are of the nature of nine to 10 to 12 months. So clearly yes, we are monitoring those very carefully. We're doing what we can to move

those that have got multiple, multiple deployments into the institutional Army, to give them a chance to take a break.

Q I pretty much figured that was it. In one of these guys' cases, I know that that's most likely the case, given the patches he puts on. But I just thought I'd give you a chance to tell us that.

GEN. BYRNE: Okay. But, you know -- but you did hit the nail on the head on one issue. There are -- and I talked about a little bit in my opening comments, there are a lot of soldiers that have deployed and they're fighting to get back in the fight. We try to do the right thing for the individual and the institution. I know that -- I think, was it you, John, or was it Brian that is a Vietnam veteran?

Q It's not me. I missed that one by two years.

GEN. BYRNE: Okay. Well, we're also -- we man the formations a little bit differently than we did. You know, if you remember in the Vietnam period, what ended up happening was a unit color, a set of colors, went into the theater and then they did individual replacements.

Q That's right.

GEN. BYRNE: So that in a year period, that entire formation would change over. We're doing it considerably different now, where for most of our tactical formations, brigade and below, we send that unit into theater and that unit deploys together, and then they come back a year later. So basically, the team that starts out is the team that stays together. There'll be individual replacements in limited numbers that will go in during that year period, but for the most part, that formation stays the same.

If we were doing individual replacements, then you would move a lot more people; there'd be more through-put, more people going into the fight. But since we're manning by formation, basically you have -- once that formation goes in, it's pretty much a static formation for the whole 12 months that they're there, with limited numbers of additional people going in. And that probably has kept our overall deployment numbers just a little bit lower than they would have been if we were doing 100 percent individual replacements, as we have done in previous protracted hostilities.

Q And you just answered my follow-on question. (Laughs.)

GEN. BYRNE: Anticipation.

Q Well, that's why you're a general.

MR. HOLT: And Fred.

Q Sir, the 7 percent sounds like a relatively small percentage, even at 37,000 troops. My question is are you going for a specific number that you'd like to get down to, for those who have deployed? And you said that you don't think it's a case of them not wanting to deploy and that they're in institutional positions. With all of the volunteer missions that are available, why haven't they deployed?

GEN. BYRNE: Well, first off, there's no magic number that we're looking to, to get to. The bottom line is, as I indicated, we're filling the formations, manning them -- at the appropriate levels, and we're trying to move everybody into the fight.

I think there's always going to be some portion that will never have the opportunity to serve overseas, just simply because they may come out of the training base or they may go to an institutional Army and then, for one reason or another, they just don't get into the other formation, because there's -- part of it is a timing situation.

Now, when you ask why aren't these 7 percent -- haven't they been in the fight, well, that's 7 percent today, but that's a movable number. Some of those people will get in the fight; some of those people --

We had just a situation a few months ago where when the units were extended in-theater, we thought a large number of those people would be coming back, we would move them into the institutional Army to become drill sergeants or recruiters or jobs of those types. When they did not come back from the deployment as they had originally been programmed -- they stayed three months longer -- we had gaps in drill sergeant and recruiters. We had to move some people into those formations, into the institutional Army that we would have preferred to move into the operational Army. A timing situation.

You may also have some people in those jobs right now that are relatively new to the Army. When they complete, say, a job in the Training and Doctrine Command and they're available, we'll move them out. We also move some people right out of the

institution. They come out of basic training, their advanced individual training, we send them to places like Korea. Once they complete their tour in Korea, we'll move them into another formation that will hopefully get them into the fight.

Q And that was going to be my follow-on question. Are you considering other hardship tours as part of these deployments?

GEN. BYRNE: No. These deployments are solely those that have been in support of the global war on terror. These are individuals that have deployed to the Middle East and they have drawn -- they've been drawing combat pay.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Any follow-up questions?

Q I have one more quick one, Jack.

MR. HOLT: Sure.

Q Sir, what can someone do if they want to deploy? I mean, do they need to call their assignments manager if they want to deploy?

GEN. BYRNE: That's a good step. Now, on the enlisted side, we have a great automated preference -- we call it the Assignment Satisfaction Key, ASK. It's Web-based. They can come in and express their desires there, and we use that very -- it will generally tell an individual, when they log in, they can say the type of an assignment they would like and they will be told if they're eligible for it.

But always, probably the best way to do it is verbal. If they can get on the phone, talk to their assignment managers, and if they've not been in a deployed status and they're available and they're not in a critical position someplace else, we will probably do everything we can to move them.

You know, there are some very critical specialties, as I indicated before, or specialties that there's not that many opportunities. In some cases, some in the medical field; in some cases, some of the intelligence fields where people may be working with the National Security Agency or DIA or something. Their critical specialties may be needed more back here than they would be in the deployed theater at the strategic level.

Q All right. And that kind of goes to your statement there about the impact on the battlefield not necessarily being correlated to the proximity to the battlefield.

GEN. BYRNE: Mm hmm. (In agreement.)

Q And sir, I've got a question. General Cody mentioned yesterday about the Army's transformation, the largest transformation since 1942. So how is that affecting the rotation cycles, and how are you working with that, with all the other transformation that's going on, as well as the global war on terror?

GEN. BYRNE: Well, it all, for the most part it fits together. As we've modularized the brigades over the last few years, as we've reorganized the division formations, as we have moved a lot of -- you know, we had a brigade, we had two brigades in Korea. One of them actually deployed to Iraq. When it came back from Iraq, we restationed it at Fort Carson.

The Human Resources Command is intimately involved in all those processes, because we're ones that have got to, based on the information we have, make the decisions on where people are going to go to, so that we can have them positioned correctly in the right numbers to meet those dates that they're going to be deploying.

So it's all part of the same equation, and there's a lot of cross talk going on between the operational folks over at the Pentagon, the commands out in the field, and Human Resources Command. But I kind of see it as all fitting together very well. As the formations -- and as we've transformed the Army, the transformation leads to, in some cases, better predictability of when the units are going to deploy, and it gives us the opportunity to man those formations right.

MR. HOLT: All right. So, any follow-on questions?

Q Yeah, just one more, if you don't mind.

MR. HOLT: Sure. Go ahead, Brian.

Q And that is, given that it's still years away -- (inaudible) -- the Army gets the expansion it's looking at, 75,000 people or whatever, which of course will resolve a lot of problems that you're having now with rotation. For now, though, you've got

X number of people in the Army, and the numbers of people that you can get deployed who haven't deployed already is relatively small.

So are you -- how are you looking at it, and by what measure will you see people staying longer -- in the U.S. longer -- after being overseas? I mean, are we ever going to return to -- I think it was historical, two-months home for every month deployed? And if not that, what's the best you think you can do in the next year or so?

GEN. BYRNE: Well, the goal of the Army's -- our AFGM model, our force generation model, is for there to be a one-to-three. If you would deploy one year, you would have a minimum of two years back.

Q Sure.

GEN. BYRNE: That's what our life-cycle management is predicated on. But I will have to be up front with you. Everything is -- everything that we do is predicated on whatever the troop levels are in the theater. If the troop levels were at a slightly lower level, we might be able to move towards something like that.

Q Sure.

GEN. BYRNE: At the levels that we're at right now, as we're still continuing to build brigade combat teams -- we're not up to the number that we plan that we will be at the end of the plan, so we're still building those -- that's going to affect our deployment schedules, also. I think it's all predicated on demand and supply.

But the focus on the Army, though, one of the main focuses of the Army -- and I know this comes out; you referenced General Cody -- I think in almost every dialogue, the senior leaders will tell you is that one of our major goals is to reduce, where possible, deployment time and increase that dwell time that those soldiers are back at home.

Right now we're at a 15-month dwell. We're doing everything we can to try to bring that back down to a lower level.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Anything else?

Q To a low-low (ph)? You mean a longer time. (Audio break.) (Inaudible.)

Q You said a 15-minute (sic) dwell. Do you mean a 15-minute (sic) deployment?

GEN. BYRNE: Oh, okay. Right now we're at a 15-month dwell -
- I'm sorry, 15-month deployment.

Q Yes. (Laughs.)

GEN. BYRNE: We are -- right now we're going to try to do everything, (Quinn ?), we can to bring those deployments to shorter duration and increase the amount of dwell time that soldiers have between deployments.

Q Very good.

Q Okay. All right.

Q Because that is the one major difference between this and Vietnam is the standard tour length for Vietnam was 12.

GEN. BYRNE: Correct.

Q On average, what is the average dwell time right now?

GEN. BYRNE: I would have -- I don't have that exact number. I can tell you that formations are having probably close to a one-to-one, where it would be basically a year deployed and a year back. That's the brigade combat team formations. Those that are in support, it's probably a little bit longer on the dwell side.

Q Thank you, sir.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Anything else?

Q Jack, I have one more follow-up, if you don't mind.

MR. HOLT: Okay, sure.

Q With the shorter dwell times, is there still a backlog on schools, OES, NCOES, things like that, getting the soldiers through the educational system that they need to advance?

GEN. BYRNE: Yes, there is. There continues to be a considerable backlog, especially on the non-commissioned officer education programs. Now, we're instituting some changes. As the units come back now from the 15-month dwell, we're still going to

try to get -- maximize getting the people out of the formations, to get them into NCOES.

But there's also going to be a large number of mobile training teams coming out of TRADOC, our training and doctrine command, that will be going down to the installations while those units are in reset, allowing those soldiers that are in high-density-type MOSs to have their non-commissioned officers courses right there. So they could do them on the post, they'll have a -- they won't be separated from their families for longer periods. And I think that's a win-win situation. That's a major push by the TRADOC commander and the chief of staff of the Army.

Q So you're taking -- you're saying taking a BNOC to a brigade and teaching it at a brigade level, rather than that soldier going, if he's field artillery, going to Fort Sill for his BNOC?

GEN. BYRNE: That's right. But I think if -- you'll see -- you're keying in on the brigade, but I think it will be more geared towards the installation when that brigade comes back. So there may be more than one brigade on the same installation, so we can maximize getting the folks in there.

Q Gotcha.

GEN. BYRNE: But it will -- it'll be geared towards the brigade formation; it'll be open to more than just the brigade.

Q All right. Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Thank you very much. We're about out of time here, and Major General Sean Byrne with us, the commander of U.S. Army Human Resources Command. Thank you very much for being with us for the Bloggers Roundtable this morning.

Do you have any final thoughts or closing comments for us?

GEN. BYRNE: Well, I just want to say, I want to thank each and every one of you just for the opportunity to talk to you. Clearly, you've all done your homework and you had some good, tough questions here. Hopefully, I gave you the responses that made sense to you. If you need any other clarification, either myself or Colonel Arata can give you anything to help you out with that.

This is a tough issue. We're doing everything we can to have equity throughout the force, that those soldiers that have been on -- have been in the Army that have not had the opportunity to deploy, we're doing everything we can to move people out of formations that have deployed more than once, give them a chance to take a break and move other folks into the formations.

I think that's the soldiers' expectation. We've been at this war for quite a few years now, and I think the expectation of the soldiers is they all know they're going to deploy; we just need to do it right. We don't want to disrupt the cohesion leadership of the unit just to send a soldier down-range, and that's why I keyed in earlier -- we're trying to match up the skill set of that individual with the requirements inside the formation.

I think we're doing it relatively smartly. We've got people, as we indicated earlier, roughly 93 percent are either in units that have deployed, they're in their initial military training, they're in units that are scheduled to deploy, or they're in the right type of tactical units and although they don't have the deployment order, they probably will in the not-too-distant future.

So we're managing the force, I think, well. That population that's in the institutional Army that we need to move into the tactical Army, we're doing to do everything we can, when it's the right thing to do for the unit and the individual.

And with that, I'd just like to thank you all for your good, tough questions. And if you need something else, please let us know.

END.